

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the *9.*
Great SESSIONS

A T
B R E C O N,

On SATURDAY, *March* 30. 1754.

Before the Honorable

JOHN HERVEY Esq.

One of His MAJESTY'S Justices of the
Great Sessions for the *Brecon* Circuit.

By WILLIAM SKINNER M.A. Fellow
of *Pembroke* College, *Oxford*.

Published at the Request of Mr. *High-Sheriff*,
and the *Gentlemen* of the *Grand-Jury*.

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T O

JOHN HARCOURT, Esq. High-Sheriff,

A N D

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of the County of *Brecon* ;

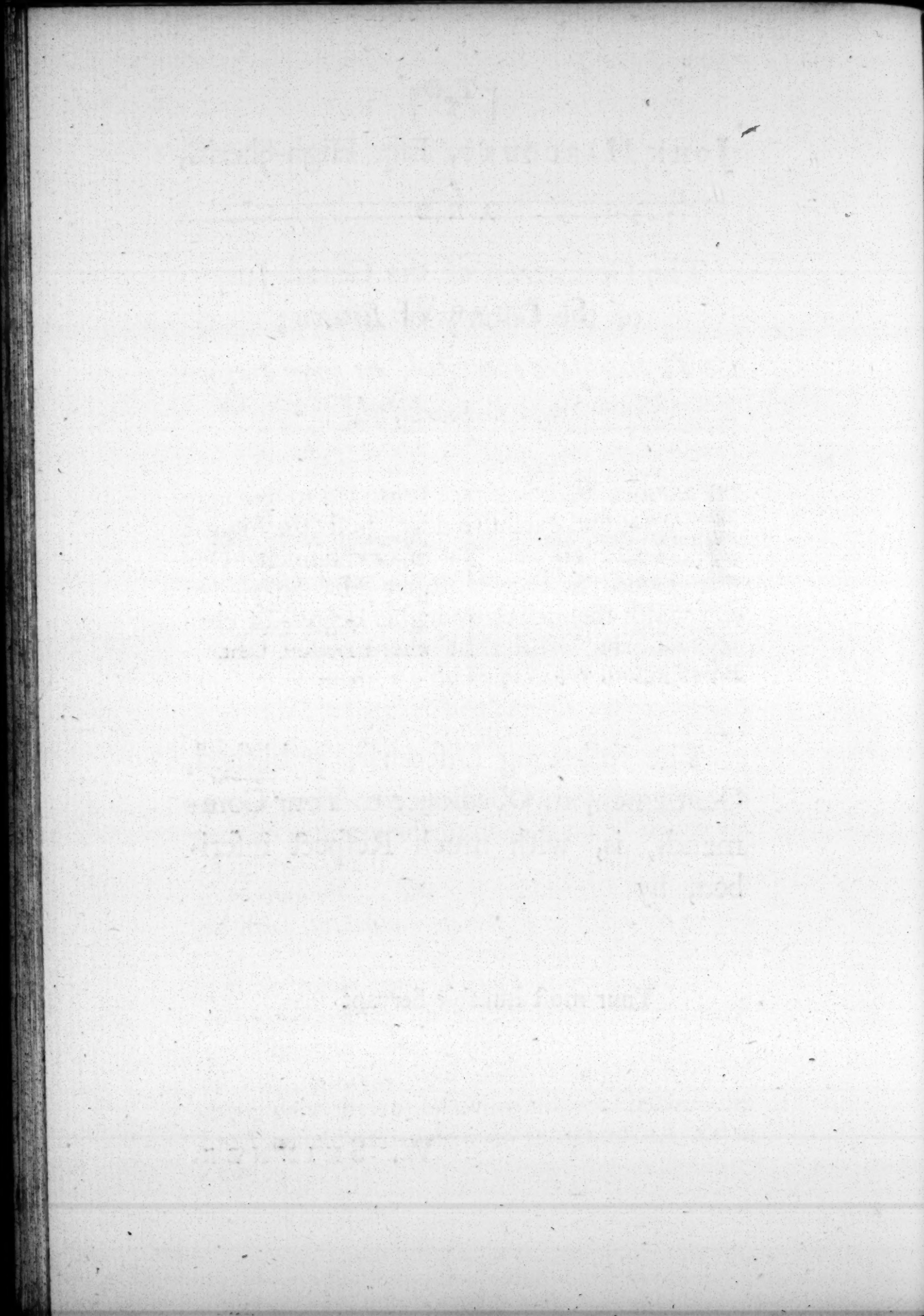
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The following Discourse, published,
Gentlemen, in Obedience to Your Com-
mands, is, with much Respect inscrib-
ed, by

Your most humble Servant

W. SKINNER.



St. LUKE VI. 36.

*Be Ye therefore merciful, as your Father
also is merciful.*

IN these Words is recommended to us a very great and extensive duty, from the highest of all examples, that of God himself. Our blessed Saviour is urging His disciples to distinguish themselves by higher degrees of charity and benevolence than other men, and shewing that it was not enough for them *to love and do good to such as loved and did good to them, or to lend to them from whom they hoped to receive the like favor, but that they must love their enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again;* all which he inforces from the example of their Heavenly Father, *who is kind (not to the grateful and obedient only, but also) to the unthankful and to the evil: be ye therefore merciful, saith he, as your Father also is merciful.*

By the *mercy* of God is often meant in holy scripture, as particularly in the passage before us, not merely his compassion and long-suffering, his pardoning and relieving the sinner, but his unbounded love, his universal, overflowing goodness. An imitation of which our blessed Lord
does

does here require from us. Whereby cannot possibly be meant any thing less than a general benevolence, and every reasonable act of kindness or charity, by which we may relieve, comfort, or oblige our neighbour.

It is very obvious, and almost needless to remark, that, as the mercy of God in it's utmost extent or excellence is not imitable by us, this command cannot be designed to be understood in the utmost strictness of the letter; any more than those other which injoin us *to be perfect as God is perfect*, and *holy as he is holy*: by which, as we cannot be commanded to perform impossibilities, or attain to that which is not attainable, it is not meant that we must arrive at such a perfection or holiness as is fit to be named with that of Almighty God; but that we must strive to imitate his holiness and perfection to as great a degree as the weakness of our nature will permit; that we must reflect frequently upon them, and make the consideration of them a powerful incentive to the exertion of our best, though weak, endeavours; following as well as we can the steps of our Heavenly Father, though with ever so unequal a pace. So again, in the words which I have read to you, the merciful goodness of God is set before us as a pattern: to equal it in any sense is impossible: but we may arrive at a small, a distant likeness. Awful as the distance is between him that made us and us his sinful, unworthy creatures, we must not despair of bringing by degrees our conduct and disposition in some measure to resemble his. It is our duty to
place

place the great original before our eyes, attentively to consider it, and (which is all we can) to copy after it in little; though we cannot but be sensible that, after all our pains, the justness of proportion must greatly suffer, and the resemblance be extremely faint and imperfect.

Keeping then in view the great example proposed to us, I shall consider the duty of being merciful or benevolent (as the words I have chosen will naturally lead me to consider it) as an imitation of the divine goodness, and a duty incumbent from the sense of it. Whenever we consider it in this light, it cannot fail but that many excellent lessons and rules of conduct will be suggested to us. In what I am farther to say I shall endeavour to point out a few of the principal of them, and of these,

- I. In the first place, such as are more general, and
- II. Secondly, such as relate more particularly to the present solemn occasion.

I. Considered in a more general view, the example of the divine goodness teaches us to be compassionate, candid, forgiving, patient under wrongs and provocations, liberal, kindly affectioned, every thing in short that is benevolent and friendly.

Nor are we hereby instructed only in our duty, but obliged and called upon to be diligent in the discharge of it. For though the brightness of such an example might itself allure us, might
provoke

provoke us to love and to good works, yet is not this the only consideration to be attended to: the obligation hence arising is likewise very great; the obligation, I mean, which is laid upon us, by the love and goodness of God, to practise the duties of an universal benevolence, to be merciful to others from the sense of His being so exceedingly merciful to Us. *Freely we have received, and we ought to give freely*; and to extend to others compassion, candor, long-suffering, and forgiveness, since we stand so much in need of, and presume to expect them, ourselves. Nothing can be more reasonable than that they should shew mercy, who have found, or hope for, mercy: nothing more just than that inference of the Apostle, *" Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*. To Him we can make no return: He is far out of the reach of our good offices: nor is it possible that any thing we can do should add to His all-perfect happiness. What he expects is, that we should love our brethren for His sake, and shew our gratitude to Him by the most extensive acts of beneficence to our fellow creatures.

How infinitely are we all indebted to the love and goodness of God! How manifold are his mercies! *O how great is the sum of them! If I should attempt to declare them and speak of them, they should be more than I am able to express*. How odious then in the sight of so gracious a Being, of a God that *delighteth in mercy, and is full of compassion*, must that cruelty and want of bowels

a 1 St. John iv. 11.

be, too often seen among us ! Compassion for our infirmities and wants is sufficient motive with our great Benefactor to succour and relieve us, though himself incapable of weakness, want or pain : and shall We then steel our hearts, and behold with indifference the sufferings and miseries of our brethren, when liable ourselves to every distress which they can possibly feel ? What plea or excuse is it that we would make for being hard-hearted, rigid, or severe ? We, to whom so much forbearance and gentleness are continually indulged, whose daily bread, whose every breath we draw, depends upon no other tenure than mercy undeserved ?

So far are we from being justified in any want of tenderness or concern for man who is our brother, that even the brute creation, so much less related to us, have a right to be thus far considered, and plead a title to our pity and kind usage. A part of our duty this, well worth our remembring, though too much neglected by us. Great as the disparity may be between us and them, they are our fellow creatures still. A right we have to their service, and even, on proper occasions, over their lives ; but we have none to use them ill, or put them wantonly to pain. The Angel of the Lord, when his hand was lifted up to punish the disobedient *Balaam* was moved to compassion by the dumb eloquence of the beast he rode upon : *"wherefore, saith he, hast thou smitten thine ass these three times ? unless she had turned from me, surely now I had slain thee, and*

a Numb. xxii. 32. 33.

B

saved.

saved her alive. A righteous Man, says the wise Solomon, regardeth the life of his beast. He will never think he has a right to despise every thing which is placed below him, or look upon the ease or the sufferings of the inferior part of the creation as a matter of indifference, unworthy of his notice or concern. They who are of another mind, will not surely pretend that they are imitators of their Heavenly Father's goodness. He thinks them not below his care: His mercies are over all his works. He, though the King of kings, condescends to be the feeder of the raven, and extends his providential care to the sparrow. When the wickedness of man had brought a flood upon the earth, we find him not only thinking upon his servant Noah, but ^a remembering also every living thing and all the cattle that was with him in the ark. How graciously does he consider what even the very cattle of the Ninevites must suffer, as one argument for withholding his hand, and suspending the destruction with which he had threatned their profligate city! ^b Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much cattle?

These are but the minuter instances of His love, by whose stupendous goodness all nature subsists, and to which every thing that is owes it's being and preservation. This is but tracing the smaller streams from that *fountain of living waters*. Yet ought not these to go unobserved;

a Gen. viii. 1.

b Jonah iv. 11.

nor let them be observed in vain. Let us *be followers of God as dear children*. Let it appear that so winning and instructive an example is not without it's proper force upon us. Let us remember and be convinced that Man was made to feel for others as well as himself, and that every thing which has sense has a title to compassion.

Another lesson we may learn from the great example here set before us, is a kind overlooking of faults and offenses, a candid and favorable treatment of the slips and miscarriages of our brethren; nay and of those more provoking and heinous *trespasses which they at any time trespass against us*. Should God *enter strictly into judgment, no man living could be justified in his sight*. Were he *extreme to mark what is done amiss*, Where among us all is the man that would be *able to abide it*? From His tender mercy let Us also learn to be merciful. It should be our care, always to think, and consequently to speak, as charitably and candidly as the matter will allow of. By treating thus favorably the conduct of our neighbours, we shall escape having our own rigorously examined; which, as we well know, is what our very best actions will not bear: whereas by a contrary behaviour we shall provoke Almighty God to shew Us no more favor than We have shewn to others; *out of our own mouths will be judge us*, and by our own hard sentences shall we stand condemned. *Judge not therefore hardly and uncharitably, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not rashly, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*

And surely most unworthy shall he be thought of God's forgiveness, who scruples to comply with this so reasonable a condition; who presumes to hope for pardon for his own faults, and yet indulges in himself an unforgiving, unrelenting temper. ^a "He that revengeth," saith the son of *Sirach*, "shall find vengeance of the Lord, and he will certainly retain his sins. Forgive thy neighbour that hath hurt thee; so shall thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest. One man beareth hatred against another; and Doth he seek pardon of the Lord? He sheweth no mercy to a man like himself; and Doth he ask forgiveness of his own sins?" Of such a man we may safely say, that he cannot be *Christ's* disciple: his religion is of another spirit: he allows us not to expect, no nor to ask forgiveness, upon any other terms than *forgiving them that trespass against us*. Neither does he permit us to set bounds to our forgiveness, or to say Thus far I will pardon and no farther, once more I will receive to favor and then bid adieu to mercy; *he saith not unto us until seven times, but until seventy times seven*. Do we think this too much? or forget that we have been thus dealt with ourselves? Behold, our common Lord and Master vouchsafes to set us the example. And *ought not we then to have compassion on our fellow servants, even as he hath pity on us*. We have ^b read indeed of a wretch, that was base enough to insist rigorously with a fellow servant for a trifle, when his Lord had but just before forgiven him freely ten thou-

^a Ecclesi. XXVIII. 1, 2, 3, 4.

^b St. Mat. xviii. 23 &c.

land times the sum. His fate was, that *his Lord was wroth*, and revoked his intended kindness. This, if we take not heed, will be our fate also. For thus are we taught by the best authority, in application of this case, *So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* The time will come when it will be in vain to wish our hearts had been softer, and our conduct more humane.

Let us therefore, Brethren, *put away from us all malice ; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us.* He that would be reconciled to God, must first be reconciled to his brother ; and if we desire to make our forgiveness of others effectual to obtain pardon for our own faults, we must take care to make it universal. No unworthiness, no treatment ever so injurious, will excuse our making exceptions : no, we must not harbour an ill design against the most rancorous or implacable of our enemies, but live in charity with all mankind.

Not that we are to think ourselves obliged to have the same affection or esteem for all alike : such refinement would be ridiculous and absurd. It were inconsistent with the practice of other duties ; with that especial regard which is due to the household of faith, to our native country, to our own families, and to our particular friends and benefactors ; nay oftentimes with self-preservation : it is indeed in the nature of things impossible.

possible. There is no doubt but that God bears a very different kind of regard to the good from what he is pleased to retain for the wicked : and We may very lawfully *make a difference* in the degree of our love, where nature, merit, or gratitude, require it. It is not expected that we should entertain the same good opinion of them from whom we have met with wrongs and base usage, as of them from whom we have experienced friendship and honorable dealing. We are no where commanded to trust him that has betrayed us, or believe him that has deceived us : it can be no man's duty to put a sword into the robber's hand, or take a serpent into his bosom. But we are heartily to forgive all that have any way been injurious to us, and to pray that God would forgive them ; and (which will be the best proof of our sincerity in the other) we are likewise to take all opportunities of doing them good, all, I mean, that are not inconsistent with other duties, or our own reasonable security.

Above all, we must never think of avenging ourselves upon them. *Vengeance is mine*, says Almighty God, *I will repay*. It is in much better hands than ours. He will hereafter amply *recompense tribulation to them that trouble us*, and in the mean time has not denied us a present remedy ; allowing one which we may lawfully have recourse to, in the public administration of justice. For private persons to take upon them to avenge themselves, is directly subversive of the peace and happiness of society, and most contrary

ry to the end of all government among men. So far are we Christians from being intrusted with any such destructive privilege, that it would be hard to say what is more strictly, frequently, or solemnly forbidden us. We are not *to return evil for evil*, but *to overcome evil with good*. We are to *turn the other cheek also*, patiently to submit to wrongs and bear with provocations; that is, doubtless, so far as is agreeable to the end hereby to be answered, the preservation of the peace of society, which by an unlimited suffering of wrongs, reason and common sense will teach us, would soon be destroyed. But so far as is not inconsistent with this end, or contradictory to the principles of reason, it is our duty to bear with the failings, infirmities, follies, and offenses of our brethren, and to *shew all meekness to all men*.

Nor let us imagine that such gentle and meek demeanour would be any real lessening or disgrace to us. Revenge is the passion of a little mind, and, as hath been observed of cruelty also, very apt to lurk in the coward's breast. The soul of the truly brave and generous is above entertaining little piques and low resentments, ready to pardon wrongs, and disposed to overlook affronts as unworthy of it's care or notice. This is not, I own, the language of modern honor; that idol which men themselves have made, and now they fall down and worship it. That teaches another doctrine, whose principles are those of jealousy and revenge, and pride, which, alas! *was not made for man*. Let us apply to this case
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the great example before us. Should Almighty God deal with us in this respect as we are too apt to deal with one another — The very supposition of such a thing might make one tremble. On the contrary, How patiently does he bear with all our frowardness and perverseness, our obstinacy and repeated provocations! Nay when men are so daringly wicked as to profane his sacred Name, blaspheme his glorious attributes, treating Him and all his gracious offers with insolence and scorn, and when one might not unreasonably expect him to dash them to pieces in a moment; yet is he still *slow to anger*, mercifully waits their coming to a better mind, and endeavours to win them to him by kindness, gentleness, and long-suffering. Where then would be the loss of honor, if we pursued a conduct which we might boast in some measure resembled His? That cannot surely be dishonorable, which is the practice of God himself. Can that be *base*, which the Lord of heaven and earth condescends to? Shall *the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity* vouchsafe to set a pattern of gentleness and patience, and *man that is a worm* disdain to follow it? disdain to follow the steps of Him that made him?

Another branch of this extensive duty of being merciful is liberality. In this particular likewise the example of our Heavenly Father will be a most instructive guide, will be *a lantern unto our feet and a light unto our paths*. He *giveth to all men liberally*: He withdraweth not his bounty upon every provocation, but continueth to
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heap *the riches of his goodness* upon those who are least worthy of it; relieving us because we want, not because we deserve, his pity; *making his sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sending rain upon the just and upon the unjust.* That we may, as well as we are able, imitate this his great mercy, let us not suffer resentment or groundless partiality to intrude themselves upon us, when proper objects come in the way of our kindness or our alms: let us think the power of doing good offices a sufficient call, and the need of them a sufficient claim. No private disagreements, no difference of opinion in civil or religious matters, can be a reasonable bar to charity.

Never perhaps were prejudices from a difference of opinion carried to a greater height than between the *Jews* and the *Samaritans*: they held themselves loosed from the common obligations of civility, if not of humanity, towards each other. The *Samaritans*, we read, would not entertain our Saviour, ^a *because his face was set as though he would go to worship at Jerusalem.* As the woman told him, when he only asked a little water to drink, ^b *the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.* Yet has our Lord left us a noble exception to this narrowness of mind, in the ^c *story of the good Samaritan* who had compassion on a poor robbed and wounded *Jew*. The Application he makes of it concerns every one of us as much as him to whom he spake it: go, saith he, *and do thou likewise.*

The merciful God not only *giveth to all men liberally*, as I before took notice, *but also upbrai-*

^a St. Luke ix. 53.

^b St. John iv. 9.

^c St. Luke x. 30 &c.

deth not. In imitation of this divine excellence, be it our watchful care to avoid that most ungenerous inhumanity of insulting the afflicted, that most odious meanness of upbraiding those we have been kind to, lest if insolence or reproaches mingle themselves with our acts of kindness, even *our tender mercies become cruel.* There is a certain delicacy often attendant upon distress; so that many a favor is done in so unkind a manner, as instead of opening the heart of the receiver with gratitude and love for his benefactor, serves only to mortify him, and render him the more unhappy.

The example of God, the acts of whose goodness are directed by unerring wisdom, is likewise a rule to us for doing the good we do in the most prudent and useful manner we can. No small degree of caution is requisite in this matter, and more particularly as to almsgiving; lest what is bestowed liberally be bestowed unprofitably; the case of a great part of what is given to those whose circumstances we are unacquainted with, much being given to the profligate and idle, to the detriment and wrong of those who have a prior title to our bounty. An affair this, in which every man's discretion must be his guide, in which no certain rules can be laid down; an evil, against which the united wisdom of the legislature, and the zealous endeavours of many worthy Magistrates, have not as yet been able to provide an effectual remedy.

Our liberality must also resemble that of our Father which is in heaven as to the principle it proceeds from: if it come not of a principle of
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real love, it is of no value. *Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

The object of our charity must be all mankind, the deserving and undeserving. We must love them for their Heavenly Father's sake, and respect our Maker's image, upon whatsoever materials it may be impressed. Neither is it enough to forgive injuries, and abstain from hurting: we must reconcile our affections to all mankind, sincerely wish them well, and pray for them.

Our blessed Lord, who taught the world a more sublime and refined morality than it ever before had heard of, commands us to serve the disobliging, and do good for evil; *to do to men, not as they do to us, but as we would that they should do to us; to do good to them that hate us, to bless them that curse us, and pray for them that despitefully use us.* Nor is this all; he enjoins us even to *Love our enemies.* An hard saying! but such that the more we consider it, the more we perceive the reasonableness of it. For what is that objection, which the consideration of our merciful, offended God's example shall not silence? All our worthlessness could not provoke him to abandon us, or withdraw his loving-kindness from us. He sent no less a Person to our rescue than his only-begotten Son: who was content to empty himself of his eternal glories, to suffer death and shame for us, unworthy as we are of the least of his mercies. After this, what provocation from any of our brethren shall be thought sufficient to exclude them from our af-

fection? Are they enemies? so were we. Are they ungrateful? so were we. Are they unworthy of all favor? we were so in a much greater degree. In a word, to love them who deserve it not at our hands, is the nearest imitation of the goodness of God, which we can possibly arrive at.

II. I have now considered the example of the divine goodness, as affording both instruction and incitement to us, in the discharge of several important parts of the great duty of benevolence or christian charity. Hitherto I have spoken to our blessed Saviour's precept, *to be merciful as our Father also is merciful*, as a most useful guide to us in our general conduct: let us now proceed to inquire what may be learnt or concluded from it, with respect to the particular occasion upon which we are now assembled.

And, first, let us remember, that, as Almighty God is a God of justice as well as mercy, they who would follow his example, and *be merciful as he is merciful*, must be careful so to copy after the pattern of his mercy, as may be at the same time consistent with an imitation of his justice; an attribute no less essential to him than his goodness.

The duty then of being merciful after his example does by no means extend to the restraining of public judicatures. The severities decreed by them are so far from being breaches of christian mildness and benevolence, that they are the highest acts of charity and mercy; having for their end, not the suffering of the offender, but the

the good of others ; striking terror into the wicked, giving redress to the injured, protection to the innocent, relief to the oppressed, refuge to the persecuted, warning and safety to all. They are indeed in some sort an image of the dread tribunal of God himself ; who, we know, is a most just Judge, and yet without the least derogation from his mercy.

And as verdicts and sentences are given without any breach of christian love and gentleness, so likewise are prosecutors, solicitors, and all that are any way concerned in bringing notorious offenders to justice, most usefully, honestly, and charitably employed. It is weakness, not mercy, which thinks otherwise. The honor of Almighty God, and the peace and welfare of society, require that violent outrages and wrongs, and wilful transgressions of the laws, should not be suffered to go unpunished, nor *the sword of the Magistrate be borne in vain*.

As necessary is it that our property should be secured to us, and a remedy granted against such as would injuriously withhold or invade it. Our Saviour indeed commands us ^a *not to resist the evil* : by this he means not to deprive us of legal, but of private satisfaction. But though we are not forbidden to seek a reasonable remedy, most certainly we are the being of a litigious temper, the maintaining of frivolous, vexatious, and oppressive suits. Of such St. Paul speaks, when he ^b condemns going to law. It was by no means his intention to censure in general the appeals made to higher powers in their judicial

^a St. Mat. v. 39.

^b 1 Cor. vi.

capacity : we find him more than once pleading before temporal judicatures. Nay we have an instance of our blessed Lord himself referring a complainant to the courts of justice : *“ who, says he, made me a judge or a divider over you ? ”* meaning, that he was himself as a private person, and it did not belong to such, but to the public magistrate, to do him justice.

But though there remain no doubt but that we may lawfully apply to the magistrate for redress of our wrongs, yet let us beware of applying to him through any other motive than a love of justice, or a necessary regard to our rights and future security. Judicial proceedings are the best way we have of restraining the wickedness of mankind, and keeping communities in peace ; and all abuses of an institution so useful, are upon that account the more heinous. Neither laws themselves, nor the execution of them, since they are made and executed by men, can ever be so perfect, but that much wrong and wickedness may be legally committed, much uncharitable and unchristian dealing shelter itself under a pretended Zeal for justice ; while forms of law become a convenient covert, from whence the wicked may take the more secure aim, and wound an adversary the more deeply. Injustice, fraud, and hard usage of our brethren, are in any circumstances bad enough, and in themselves of a dye sufficiently black : but the guilt of them is doubly aggravated, when the administration of justice is made subservient to them, when the wound comes as it were from the hand of a friend, when *the things that should have been for*

our wealth become the occasion of our falling into the snare prepared for us. Let therefore no resentments, or indirect views, tempt us to so great a crime, as endeavouring to make the laws the instrument of that revenge which they restrain us from taking ourselves, or of destroying those rights which they were made to preserve. If we think we have received a damage we ought not to submit to, and are disposed to sue for the legal remedy, let us not be too hasty, nor suffer the tumult of passion to drown the still voice of reason. Let us never forget upon these occasions the duty of being merciful, or lose sight of the patience and long-suffering of our Heavenly Father. If it be possible, as much as lieth in us, in this as well as every other respect, let us live peaceably with all men.

Law is the last resort of the true Christian, the humane, meek, and peaceable man. He will bear much and long, abate something of his right, put up with small matters, and be content to suffer some slighter injuries, rather than occasion trouble, expense, and ill blood. He will be sure to try first all gentler means, before he proceed to this, his last remedy; and if obliged to it at length by the obstinacy of his adversary, will still preserve his charity and his temper, will use none but fair and just methods, far from endeavouring to conceal or disguise the truth, or pervert the equal course of justice.

A like disposition does also well become those, who are employed on the behalf of others. Whatever artifice or evasion may be pardonable in him who stands in the place of a criminal, in capital

capital or highly penal cases, on account of the self-preservation he is supposed to labour for; in civil causes no such tricks or shifts are allowable; and he that, acting for another, does what was not lawful for that other person to have done, does it at his own peril; the guilt will lye upon himself, and he draws down the vengeance of God upon his own head. The conscientious advocate and solicitor will never think themselves at liberty to lay aside *the fear of the Lord, and the bowels of compassion*, purely because a wicked man desires it, or hope to justify themselves by their fees for acting against truth and justice. They know that the Almighty *beareth the cry* of the injured and oppressed, and *putteth their tears into his bottle*, and that the sufferings of the poor *are noted in his Book*. They know that they must one day appear at another bar; a bar, where it would little avail them, nay much aggravate their guilt, to plead in excuse for having *perverted justice* that they had *taken Reward against the innocent*.

The duty of being merciful may seem in general not much to concern them who attend here to serve their country upon juries, they being obliged to go not by opinion but by evidence: I shall only say that there are occasions whereon it ought not however to be forgotten by them. It may teach them to be cautious of laying too heavy burdens upon the shoulders of their brethren, to be extremely tender in doubtful cases, and particularly attentive to every thing which makes for the favorable side. Our laws themselves are so merciful, and it is no small commendation

commendation of them, that where the innocence of the accused, or the wicked devices of his enemies, are apparent at first sight, he shall not even be put to his answer, or undergo the disgrace of a public trial.

I need not, I believe, take notice, that the remembering mercy, which I just now recommended as becoming jurors, does by no means imply that they are to shew favor or partiality to any one: nothing can be more contrary to their duty. When the oath has once passed our lips, all obligations of blood, gratitude, and friendship, are suspended: we have then no connexions, but with truth and justice, and general humanity.

As little room is there for favor or affection when we are called upon to give our evidence upon oath. Let us never forget, on that solemn occasion, whom we call upon to witness the truth of what we say; that we speak to God as well as man; to Him whom no falshood can deceive, no disguise impose upon, upon whom no equivocation can pass, and to whom the truth we would conceal, or disguise, or reveal only in part, is already *naked and open*. Perjury is a crime in it's own nature the most presumptuous that can be imagined, and at the same time in it's consequences the most ruinous and destructive; robbing society of it's surest dependence, as it annuls the best security we have for all that is valuable, and cancels the firmest bond we can take of man for his being faithful or sincere. Preserving a due regard for the sacred religion of an oath is the common concern of all mankind;

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and

and therefore very much to be lamented are those many concurrent causes (which need not at present be enumerated) that have so unhappily contributed to lessen the reverence of this solemn obligation, and consequently to weaken the security derived from it.

I was led into these reflections by the mention of this sacred bond's being taken of such as serve upon our juries, to assure their country of their impartial justice, when so great a charge as the lives and fortunes of their fellow subjects is committed to them. May they always be sensible what force *the oath of God* should have upon them. May such as shall at any time be called to appear in that useful capacity, be ever mindful of the weight of their duty, and thereby preserve it's reputation to so wise and admirable an institution; an institution, to which this free nation is indebted for unspeakable advantages, — the bulwark of our liberties, the glory of our envied constitution.

In a more especial manner does the duty I have been considering respect those who Preside in our courts of justice, and have the honor to be the immediate representatives of the sacred person and authority of the King. They sit in the seat of mercy as well as judgment. It is their happiness that the nature of their high office requires them to incline to the merciful side, to be the advocates of the poor, the prisoner, and the ignorant; to be *eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, and fathers to the poor.*

I shall take notice of but one more particular of the duty of being merciful, and that relates to

those unhappy men whose liberty the laws abridge, confining them in gaols and prisons. These surely, if any, are proper objects of humanity and compassion. Necessary relief, christian treatment, and a proper care of their health, are what the suspected, nay the convicts, of the greatest crimes, have a right to from us. How much more then may they lay claim to our pity and concern, who are reduced to so melancholy a situation merely through their misfortunes, or, at worst, their imprudence! Accordingly visiting, relieving, and discharging of prisoners, have always been reckoned amongst the noblest and most heroic acts of charity. In this, as in every other part of benevolence, we copy after the gracious pattern of our Heavenly Father; of Him, who *is the helper of the friendless, who beareth the mourning of such as are in captivity, and letteth the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before him. The Lord looseth men out of prison: the Lord helpeth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners.* This his goodness be it our care to imitate. *So shall we be the children of our Father which is in heaven.* So shall we escape that dreadful accusation of our great Judge, *"I was in prison, and ye visited me not: for, as he will one day tell us, inasmuch as we do it not to the least of these his brethren, we do it not to him.*

May the glorious example of our infinitely good and gracious God, have it's proper weight and influence upon us, in this and every part of our duty. May we learn to cultivate an humane

a St. Mat. xxv. 43.

and friendly disposition to all about us; to be compassionate and charitable to all that stand in need of our assistance. *May we learn to abound more and more in love and in good works*; and having first discharged the duties of our more particular relations (loving and serving in an especial manner our friends, our families, our country, and our religion) advance a step farther, a step beyond the publican and the heathen, — despise all narrowness of soul, *add to our brotherly-kindness charity*, and extend our affection to all mankind. May we learn to forbear and forgive; avoiding malice and strife, and endeavouring to live peaceably with all our brethren. Let us also beg of Almighty God, that he would give us his grace, without which we can do nothing, to sanctify and make effectual our endeavours. And forasmuch as a state of perfect peace and concord is not in this life to be looked for, and laws will always be necessary to curb the wicked, and keep the world in order; let us therefore beg his blessing upon the execution of them: earnestly beseeching him, that he would “bless and keep the “magistrates, giving them grace to execute justice,” to shew mercy, “and to maintain truth.”

And now to Him, the God of mercy, truth, and justice; the glorious Fountain, Pattern, and Rewarder, of all that is right and good; be rendered his most just tribute of praise and thanksgiving, and all dominion and honor be ascribed, for ever and ever.



